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BEFORE YOU GET STARTED

This booklet is a practical guide to developing a public participation strategy and communications plan for your municipal VISION 2020 project.

We know that every community in Alberta is unique and municipal leaders will want to involve the public in a way that best suits the needs of their community.

The pros and cons of various public involvement strategies and widely used techniques are provided for you to consider. Also provided are suggestions, based on experience, on what will likely work best in most communities.

NOTE

The four sections (numbered I, II, III, and IV) represent the four steps needed to plan a public participation and communications program. For best results, complete all four steps in the order set out in this booklet.

Section I: Public Involvement Plan helps you create a quick outline for an effective public involvement strategy.

Section II: Opportunities for Public Participation in the VISION 2020 Process provides an overview of each of the VISION 2020 program's four steps, describes what the purpose of that step is, comments on the advantages and disadvantages of involving the public, tells how to involve the public, and offers suggestions on what might be appropriate.

This section helps you decide on the appropriate points for public involvement; once you have decided on these points, incorporate these into the Public Involvement Plan you are developing in Section I.

Section III: Working with the Media. This short section explains the important role of the media to help you involve the public and how to develop and maintain good relations with the media.

Section IV: **Media Relations Planning.** This section provides advice on how to develop a brief media relations plan so that you can communicate with the public in the most effective way possible.

Appendices: These contain more detailed information and tips on public participation planning, media relations planning, model questionnaires and numerous other aids which will help you quickly and effectively develop a practical public participation program.

The contents of this document deal with ways local government entities can involve the public in the VISION 2020 process. Although suggestions are offered, this document does not in any way constitute policy of the Government of Alberta and should not be construed as such.

FOREWORD

THE ROLE OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND COMMUNICATIONS

Municipal leaders across Alberta have a major new opportunity to make an impact on their communities which will last well beyond their elected terms of office, and perhaps even beyond their lifetimes.

The VISION 2020 program has the potential to change the look, feel, quality of life and the decision-making environment in each participating Alberta community. Because this program is helping municipal councils decide on a new future for the community, the people whose lives will be affected must logically be invited to become part of the process and the resulting strategies.

The public's expectations on important community issues, like most things in our lives, has changed significantly over the past few years. As people have become better educated, more informed about current issues, and more concerned about their communities, they have become more interested in being involved in the decision-making processes that affect their lives.

In fact, many futurists agree that 'participatory democracy' (the involvement of people in special interest groups who influence the decision-making process) is an important new social trend. In short, more than ever before, people want – and expect – to be actively involved in decisions that affect their communities.

Participation

There are many reasons why council should consider involving the public in the VISION 2020 program*:

- The public has a right to be informed;

- The public interest is an essential component which must be acknowledged and incorporated into plan-making;

(*Adapted from Public Participating in Plainning for Small Communities, J. Monteith and J. Wolfe)

- Public forums allow for discussing pros and cons of ideas, goals or policies, and therefore produce more acceptable decisions;

- It helps municipal administrators, elected councils and members of the public recognize the difficulties of choices which must be made;

- The results of VISION 2020 are intended to be a practical addition to municipal governance. The results will be more acceptable if the public have been involved in the decision-making and are part of the implementation process.

(*Adapted from Public Participation in Planning for Small Communities, J. Monteith and J. Wolfe)

Finally, it is also important to recognize that a public participation initiative — if not carefully managed — has the potential to raise people's expectations unrealistically. A poorly designed public participation strategy could cause unrealistic demands upon local and senior levels of government which could never be fulfilled.

Sections I and IV of this Guide will help Municipal Councils design effective public participation and media relations strategies to avoid such problems. (Also see Appendix A1 – Ten Points For Positive Public Participation).

Communications

A good communications plan for your VISION 2020 project will fulfill two very important roles.

First, and most obviously, a good communications plan is needed to keep your publics informed about your future planning activities. To give credibility to your planning project, your public must understand, at least at a basic level, what the process is all about, the amount of commitment that has been made to the project, and the type and quality of thinking that has gone into anything you release. Communicating regularly throughout the VISION 2020 process will instill this needed awareness and understanding.

Second, a sound communications plan will help you identify and execute the steps required to get the public involved in the VISION 2020 planning process. A primary

tool to gain that public involvement will be the communications plan. In this plan you will identify when the public will be involved, what level of public involvement will be sought, and who will be responsible for ensuring that involvement. Sections III and IV of this Guide enables you to develop a solid communications plan which provides information to the public and encourages their involvement.

The VISION 2020 planning process has been developed through the experience and research of many skilled planners. An equally important component to the program, which must be developed by your VISION 2020 group, is an effective plan for giving the public support through information and involvement.

I. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PLAN

1. Decide On An Overall Goal

To plan a public involvement strategy, you must first have an overall goal. This goal will guide how the public is identified and the manner in which you will solicit their participation.

There may be a number of public involvement goals, such as:

- To identify issues important to the community, (as identified by various community groups);

- To solicit community views on: the Municipal Profile; the ideal or Preferred Future of the community; important trends and their possible impact; and

- To evaluate council's views on the Preferred Future, Trends and Constraints, the Vision Statement and Actions required.

2. List Selected Steps Where The Public Will Be Involved

You must decide at what points in the VISION 2020 process you will invite the public to participate. To help you make these decisions, review Section II – Opportunities for Public Involvement in the VISION 2020 Process. This should give you a good idea when the best times are.

3. Establish Objectives For Each Involvement Point

Consider these questions to help you decide the purpose for involving groups or individuals at the particular place in the process.

- Do you wish to just make an initial contact and let the group know that council is working on VISION 2020 and will be seeking their direct involvement later?

- Are you making contact to solicit their views or concerns?

- Are you contacting the group to ask them to evaluate, confirm, or modify council's views?

- Are you asking a particular group to provide their views because their group is unique and therefore has a different or special perspective?

4. Identify Specific Actions and Responsibilities

After you have identified when you will be involved and what specific purpose each level of involvement will serve, it is time to decide on definite actions. This section of your plan will identify:

. how you will initiate the involvement (questionnaire? open house? open council forum? media release? talk show? other?) and

. the specific people who should be assigned responsibility for action. (Normally the tasks are divided between administration staff and elected or appointed officials.) Attach dates to each action.

II. OPPORTUNITIES FOR PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN THE VISION 2020 PROCESS

One of the major decisions in developing a public participation strategy is to define when in the VISION 2020 process the public will be involved. As we saw in the previous section, that will depend upon your objectives for inviting public involvement.

To help you make these decisions, Section II describes: each of the four steps in the VISION 2020 process; the purpose of the step; the advantages of inviting public participation in the step; the disadvantages of public participation in the step; and comments on a possible strategy.

Municipal councils will have to decide what is appropriate for their particular situation.

1. Reviewing the Municipal Profile

a) Purpose of This Step

Reviewing the Municipal Profile is the first of four steps in the VISION 2020 process. The purpose of this step is to take stock of the community as it is today. This is the starting point for any planning process. This step asks the question: Where are we today? When a municipality has a shared understanding of those characteristics which make it unique, its values and its history, it can then look forward into the future. Your Municipal Facilitators will collect the appropriate information to give council a community overview.

b) Advantages of Involving the Public At This Step

The public (or special interest groups which, when combined, make up "the public") can serve to provide a broad range of opinion. These opinions can be used as the base of new data or to confirm council's opinions. The main advantage of involving the public at this point is to generate a wide range of views on exactly what makes the community unique, what the community's values are, and any points of history which may be important to a community's self-identity. This broader perspective will also help to measure the importance of various community issues. And finally, involving the public at

this early stage can serve to inform those specific groups which the municipality may want to approach later to invite their participation.

c) Disadvantages of Involving the Public At This Step

Reviewing the Municipal Profile is an information–gathering and issue–identification step which the Municipal Facilitators will be responsible for. Involving the public to generate this kind of data can be time–consuming. Also, chances are that awareness of the VISION 2020 program will be low at this early stage. Therefore, the process of involving the public will require additional time to bring them up to speed. In short, the ideal of first step involvement by the public can create some less–than–ideal time compromises. Your municipality will be the best judge of the costs versus the benefits of involving the public at this stage.

d) Steps To Involving the Public

Note: These basic steps apply no matter where in the VISION 2020 planning process you elect to involve the public. In the sections that follow, you will be asked to refer back to this page to review these steps.

There are four basic steps:

1. Select the special groups or individuals you wish to reach (see Appendix A2 – Interest Groups);

2. Identify the municipal representative(s) who will be responsible for contacting them;

3. Identify as specifically as possible the response or type of input you are seeking at this stage of the process. A good way to start this process is to write down specific questions you would like answered;

4. Select and implement the participation vehicles you feel are most suitable to gather the information or input you want (see Appendices A3 – A Selected List of Public Involvement Techniques and A14 – How To Set Up An Open House). In some cases, formalizing your list of questions into a survey is a good approach. In other cases, you

may want to hold a public forum or be a guest on an open line radio show. Several communications tools and methods of implementation are provided in the Appendix.

e) Suggestions

First Council should read and discuss the Municipal Profile which their Municipal Facilitators have compiled, as set out in Step One of the VISION 2020 process. After discussing the profile, if council feels that information is lacking, the perspective of the profile needs to be broader, or that the opinions of council are somehow not "in-sync" with the feelings of the community on certain matters, then council may choose to involve the public here. Otherwise, most councils will probably benefit more by focussing their public participation efforts in later steps (see Appendix A4 – Sample Questionnaire).

2. **Building a "Preferred Future"**

a) Purpose of This Step

The purpose of Step 2 Building a "Preferred Future" in the VISION 2020 process is to get agreement on what your ideal community of the future is like. This step is intended to be creative, encouraging people to imagine the community of the future, so that potentially innovative solutions can be found. This is a "blue-sky" brainstorming exercise, and no ideas should be discouraged or thrown out in the initial rounds. (Reality and constraints of the future are dealt with next in 3. Exploring Future Trends and Constraints).

b) Advantages of Involving the Public At This Step

Because this step involves and stimulates a creative, imaginative, and innovative view of the ideal future, it can be very beneficial to involve the public. Clearly, the more people participating, the greater the range of creative and imaginative ideas. Also, council can use this as an opportunity to ask special interest groups, such as a local art or theatre group, to provide their unique and interest-specific perspective of the ideal future. While councils will have a feel for broad public opinion, they will not likely be familiar with the detailed aspirations of all the groups functioning in a community. Involving groups at this step will help provide the details which might be missing.

This step can be a stimulating and satisfying activity for many people. Inviting the public to participate at this stage can also serve to generate interest in the VISION 2020 program. Follow-up with regular communications to maintain any interest shown by participating groups or individuals.

c) Disadvantages of Involving the Public At This Step

Involving many people in a creative and imaginative exercise takes considerable time and effort. This step asks participants to think in a particular way that some may find difficult. It is vital to thoroughly explain why groups or individuals should provide their opinions and how the information they give you is going to be used; otherwise people may see little value in getting involved. Without adequate explanation of the project's overall purpose, this step (when taken out of context) can be misinterpreted as being a "pie-in-the-sky" exercise which has no practical purpose.

Also, if not properly coordinated, there is some risk that this process can become a forum for specific interest groups to develop an unrealistic "wish list" of items that they will ask various levels of government to fund. The municipal representative speaking to such groups must be skillful in fostering the appropriate mood for this style of group activity to succeed.

d) Steps to Involving the Public

Same as for Reviewing the Municipal Profile.

e) Suggestions

Defining a new direction or goal for a community, even an ideal one, is a step that lends itself well to public discussion. The community groups and organizations that are likely to be most helpful are those which are now in the process of developing "Master Plans", "Action Plans", or other major strategic plans. Such organizations might be the Economic Development Committee, Tourism Action Planning Committee, Downtown Revitalization Committee, or Recreation Board. If you do not feel you can manage an "open call" to individuals for participation at this time, special interest group participation is an excellent alternative. (See Appendix A5 – Sample Questionnaire)

Council must consider and work with all contributions in preparing a final Preferred Future statement for the community. This is a challenging task, but will provide the most productive vision for the future. Remember that by participating in this stage of the process, expectations about participation in the rest of the VISION 2020 process will be raised.

3. Exploring Future Trends and Constraints

a) Purpose of This Step

The purpose of this step is to look at the reality of the future by discussing trends and issues. Trends are external factors (outside the community) over which we have little control or influence. Issues are local or internal matters which municipal councils likely have considerable power to deal with. By examining trends and issues, deciding which are important in the long run, and then comparing these to their Preferred (or ideal) Future, you can begin to assess what is possible and what may be difficult to achieve.

b) Advantages of Involving the Public At This Step

Views will probably vary on the trends most likely to influence the community in the future, and whether that influence will help or hinder the direction the community wants to take. The main advantage of involving the public in this step is to gather the insight of special interest groups. This is particularly useful if there is an issue currently being debated. For instance, the school board, recreation committee or economic development committee may be in the midst of deliberations which may impact the municipality over the long term.

Also, community groups which are presently involved in an issue now have an opportunity to study how future trends may influence their future operations. If some issues re-occur with regularity, inviting the responsible groups to help assess trends and issues could provide them with a long-term perspective, possibly resulting in a long-term solution.

Participants in Step 3 are obliged to focus on constraints. This can be an eye-opening experience for some groups. Sometimes community groups are not aware of the severe financial and human resource constraints that most

organizations will have to cope with in the years ahead. Involving such groups at this step may help them recognize constraints, not only for their organization, but for the municipality as well.

c) Disadvantages of Involving the Public At This Step

As in previous steps, there is the risk that without adequate explanation of how this step fits into the VISION 2020 process and how the input will be used, the public may see little value in participating. This particular step in the process is not as much fun as "blue-sky" thinking, for example. This is the very analytical part of the VISION 2020 process, and requires logical, realistic thinking. It is very difficult for some people or groups to keep the "big picture" in mind. And, it is even difficult sometimes to accept some trends as a possible reality simply because the community may not have yet been influenced by them. People must work with "givens" in this step, and working with constraints is often difficult.

d) Steps to Involving the Public

Same as for Reviewing the Municipal Profile.

e) Suggestions

This step requires personal evaluations on what trends are important and how they might affect the municipality. Involving the public is difficult because it requires people to evaluate things that have not happened yet. If you choose to involve the public, provide them with concrete material to evaluate. Council's Summary Statements from Step 3 of the Discussion Guide are appropriate (see Appendices A6 – Sample Questionnaire and A9 – VISION 2020 Video Tapes on Trends).

4. **Vision Statement and Action**

a) Purpose of This Step

The purpose of this step of the VISION 2020 process is to develop the Vision Statement a carefully developed view of the future of your community which is idealistic, yet tempered by reality. The Vision Statement and Actions for Implementation begin to move your community in a preferred way towards the year 2020.

b) Advantages of Involving the Public At This Step

This is the most critical time to involve the public. Here, council will have a draft Vision Statement which describes a new direction for the community. Council will likely have a good idea of some of the major resources in the community which can help them achieve their new direction. It is now relatively easy to identify the major resource groups in a community and invite them to evaluate the chosen direction (the Vision Statement) and how the community intends to get there (the Action). By having numerous groups participate, many opinion leaders in a community can focus on the newly-stated future direction and ask: Does this direction make sense? Does this Vision Statement include my organization and our aspirations? What are our resources? How can our group help the community work towards its new direction?

Also, community organizations will have (in the draft Action) a place to identify the specific tasks, opportunities and initiatives for which they can take responsibility.

c) Disadvantages of Involving the Public At This Step

One possible risk of inviting public participation in this step is causing a public backlash if it appears that council has already made a decision and is now trying to force that decision upon the community. As long as it is clear that the documents are discussion drafts only, and that the reason for inviting comment is to modify the Vision Statement and Action according to community views, then this should be trouble-free.

d) How to Get the Public Involved At This Step

Same as for Reviewing the Municipal Profile.

e) Suggestions

If a council chooses to involve the public in a limited way and only in one step of the process, this should be the step. Some councils may wish to develop their draft Vision Statements and Action quickly (in as little as 2-3 council sessions.) With the draft Vision Statement and Actions, a substantial time can be devoted to public discussion on the merits of council's views (see Appendix A7 - Sample Questionnaires).

III. WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

1. The Role of the Media in VISION 2020

The media can be a crucial link between council's discussions on a new community direction and getting a message to the community–at–large. In some communities, councils deal regularly with newspaper, radio and TV reporters. In other communities, these kinds of contacts can be less regular and often informal.

In many communities, the local newspaper and possibly a radio station are the main source of community news. News editors are always looking for interesting, community – unique happenings. The media can provide these kinds of coverage for your VISION 2020 project:

- A news story describing council's discussions in the process;
- An announcement of a public meeting or other public involvement activities;
- A feature story about council's use of VISION 2020;
- Coverage of a press conference concerning a major announcement (such as the release of a draft Vision Statement and Action) or event (such as an open house);
- Editorial commentary of a council's discussions;
- Coverage of reader response to the program.
- Circulation of a survey you wish to distribute at particular points in the process.

Working with the media can make your job easier in communicating your message to the whole community. Like other important tasks, the most successful public relations programs are often based on having a plan (see Section IV following).

2. Key Points in Media Relations

a) Planning and Coordination

To ensure consistency of the messages being released and that all communications are coordinated, it is a good idea to designate one person to be the municipal media contact. This could be the mayor or a staff person such as public relations personnel (if the municipality has one) or a senior municipal administrator like the town or city manager.

Ideally, the relationship with the media should be developed through regular personal contact. Whoever your designated media contact person is, that person should strive to talk to news editors and reporters regularly (and informally) to keep the project at the forefront of the media's list of newsworthy community events (see Appendix A10 – Tips for Working with the Media).

The following Section IV – Media Relations Planning will help you develop a quick and easy Media Relations Plan.

b) News Conferences

A news conference can be a good way to generate media interest in a community project. This is a useful technique when the council wishes to make a big announcement or when the newsworthy topic is better explained face–to–face (see Appendix A11 – How To Hold A News Conference).

Keep this one thought in mind: media reporters are extremely busy and are constantly under great time pressures. Making their job easier will make your working relationship better.

c) News Releases

News releases have many advantages. They allow you to: release information when it is timely (at a convenient point in the project, when council wishes to make an announcement or invite the community to comment); ensure consistency and accuracy of the message being provided (announcing the time, date and location of a meeting); and identify a municipal contact person for further information. (See Appendix A12 – Writing a News Release).

d) Media Appearances – Radio and TV

Radio and television can reach broad audiences quickly, frequently within hours of newsworthy events. While the principles of working with radio and TV are essentially the same as working with the print media, more time and preparation may be required. Municipal representatives who appear on radio or TV programs require a thorough knowledge of their VISION 2020 project (see Appendix A13 – Tips For Radio and TV).

IV. MEDIA RELATIONS PLANNING

1. Goal

To be successful on a major project like VISION 2020, media relations must be planned. When working with the media, council must agree what their major goals are so that the communications effort is coordinated and consistent. And it is often very useful to discuss these goals with the news supervisors within the various media. Often, they can commit to regular coverage of certain activities (like to results of crucial discussions) so both you and they know in advance what to expect. They can also give you an idea of the best way to present that information to them, and they can even give you some idea of what not to expect from them.

To agree on the major goals of the media relations plan, council must answer the question: What do we want to achieve in contacting the media?

2. Our Municipal Media Contact

A major part of media relations planning is to have a clearly identified contact person for the media. The designated person must: be familiar with the community's VISION 2020 program; know the major timing points; know where in the VISION 2020 process council is; be aware of major decision points and when the public will likely be involved; be readily accessible to the media; be a credible spokesperson; and have an easily identified position in the community or administration.

Municipal Media Contact Is: _____

Title: _____

Phone: _____

Address: _____

3. Our Policy On Media Contact

Relations with the media can sometimes go awry. This usually happens when there is no clear policy on what message is to be given to the media, who is to speak to the media, and when the message is to be given to the media.

There is no easy way to decide on a media contact policy in advance; chances are the policy will have to be refined as the VISION 2020 project develops. However, you can develop a basic policy by considering these questions:

- Should the designated media contact person be the only media contact? Or are there times when any councillor can speak to the media? When might that be?

- Should administrative staff be available to discuss the VISION 2020 project with media, or should all enquiries be directed to an elected official?

- What documents will be released to the media? (Those that inform are good; those that may confuse are probably not appropriate.)

- Is council concerned whether councillors show a "united front" or does media coverage of council's differing opinions contribute to public discussion?

- Does council wish to conduct none, some, or all sessions in-camera?

The key points in establishing a media relations policy are: "be available"; "be consistent"; and "be fair". The last one requires a bit of explanation. In communities where there are several media sources, some may emerge as supporters of the project, others may be "devil's advocates". Showing preferential treatment is not fair, and can usually make it worse for you in the long run.

It is also not fair to the media or your fellow councillors to deviate from your established media policy. If for example, you agree to provide highlights of each session in the form of a news release, stick to that format. Nothing can make a media reporter more unco–operative than taking you at your word that he has the "official news" only to find that someone else has scooped him by contacting one of the other participants. From that point on, he or she will take your "official release" with a grain of salt and head straight for the source with the "real news".

4. Key Media Contact Points

Just as you should pre-determine points at which you will solicit public involvement, so too should you establish a plan of appropriate times to contact the media. This plan will be very flexible of course, because you cannot always anticipate key contact times. But by organizing those times that you can identify, the ability to respond to other unexpected situations will come much easier.

Your Public Involvement Plan will provide many signals as to appropriate times to contact the media. Review this plan, then list the appropriate points when you will contact the media. For each contact point, answer the following questions:

1) What is the purpose of the contact?

2) When should it be done?

3) How should it be done?

4) By whom should it be done?

Example:

Your group has decided to go through the final two stages of the VISION 2020 process without formal public involvement. Yet, you recognize the importance of public awareness of your activities to establish the credibility of the process. You decide that the public should be advised of the process, through the media, after each session that council discusses VISION 2020.

1) <u>What is the purpose of the contact?</u>

   To ensure public awareness of our futures planning process and update them on the progress of council's discussions.

2) <u>When will the contact be made?</u>

   Within 24 hours of the close of the council session.

3) <u>How should it be done</u>? and

4) By whom?

a) The media relations coordinator will prepare a highlights document by 10:00 a.m. the following morning.

b) The mayor will personally call selected media to provide information and background views on the program.

c) The media relations coordinator will follow-up with a hard copy of the highlights to each media person that afternoon.

LAST WORDS

If you have followed each Section (I, II, III and IV) consecutively, you will have developed a quick, practical, and effective Public Participation Plan and Media Relations Plan.

While this booklet is intended to help municipal councils actively involve the public and communicate effectively with them (with a minimum of outside assistance if they so choose), some municipal officials may with to use the services of knowledgeable professionals.

APPENDICES

TEN POINTS FOR POSITIVE PUBLIC PARTICIPATION*

If you use these ten tips when you are trying to increase the level of participation by the public, you will find the response to be quite remarkable. Good public participation will lead directly to community development on a broad front, and this, for most communities, is going to be a requirement for the future.

Development, growth, and improved quality of life tend to come to those communities which demonstrate an ability to take initiatives on their own and to look after their own needs in an effective, efficient and economical way.

1. Let people know what is going on; provide as much information as possible to avoid "surprise parties";

2. Actively seek public input by inviting key people within the community to participate in planning and decision-making;

3. Push people for alternatives when they criticize ideas and ask for suggestions;

4. Seek involvement of interested and affected groups or individuals in carrying out certain tasks (such as implementing various parts of the Action Agenda)

5. Delegate authority, responsibility for action and evaluation to community groups;

6. Give recognition for contributors of ideas and efforts to the individuals that have taken the time to get involved;

7. Celebrate creative or innovative changes and reward the risk-takers and people who have shown initiative and leadership;

*Adapted from notes by D. Turner, Principle Resource Management Ltd., Edmonton

8. **Reduce formality and elitism;**

9. **Use first names and be friendly: warm and genuine encourages; cold and withdrawn discourages;**

10. **Capitalize on group influence; peer groups have a tremendous power to influence.**

LIST OF POSSIBLE PARTICIPANT GROUPS/INDIVIDUALS

Every community has its own unique set of active and influencial people, community groups, associations, clubs, and special interest organizations. List the local groups or individuals who would be good "sounding boards" for council.

Organizations	Their Next Meeting Date	Contact Person	Telephone
Chamber of Commerce			
Other Business Associated			
Mall Association			
Lion's Club			
Rotary Club			
Oddfellows			
Progress Club			
Toastmasters			
Historic Society			
Church groups			
Schools			
Senior Citizens Org.			
Curling Club			
Skating Club			
Swimming Club			
Golf Club			
YMCA			
YWCA			

	Their Next Meeting Date	Contact Person	Telephone
Special Groups			
Community Tourism Action Plan Committee			
Downtown Revitalization Committee			
Economic Development Committee			
Community Futures Program			
Voluntary Groups and Other Agencies			
Men's and Women's Shelters			
Immigrant Associations			
Native Friendship Centres			
Other Groups and Individuals			

A SELECTED LIST OF PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT TECHNIQUES

(Adapted from D.M. Connor, Citizens Participate:
An Action Guide for Public Issues)

Advisory Committees – effectiveness best in small communities and short projects. Representatives can be difficult to justify and can become supervisory rather than advisory.

Community Self-Survey – data gathered from public, usually households, in cooperation with local groups whose members can distribute and collect questionnaires. Fosters involvement and belief in results.

Consultation – a higher level of public involvement which solicits the views and opinions of the public. Staff resources are required and is therefore more costly than pure information collection. No responsibility is shared with the public; this approach requires agreement on terms of involvement.

Delegated Authority – is the highest level of public involvement. The public takes on responsibility for the outcome and is particularly appropriate when involving service delivery actions. Very appropriate for implementing Action Agendas, but generally unsuitable for capital investment matters.

Essay Contest – useful for stimulating desire for more information and a good way to establish community values. When aimed at school-age children, there tends to be a strong reflection of parental values.

Focus Group – using key community individuals who have long residence, secure position, frequent contact with the public, and high credibility to act as a sounding board.

Forums – lead by a facilitator or moderator, a forum is less formal than a public meeting, but is still an opportunity for public debate or mutual exchange of views. This could be useful as a discussion mechanism for bringing together specific interest groups which may have some common interests. Forum representatives could present findings to Council hearings.

Householder Mailing – a good way to reach all households with information, for instance when the draft Vision Statement or Actions.

Information Centre – part of the municipal office or public library where the public can view information at their leisure.

Introductory Brochure – a short, simple introduction to the Vision 2020 project in your community. Describes purpose; method; role of public; include a stamped postcard to allow interested people get onto mailing lists for more information or involvement as the project progresses.

Mass Media Campaign – used towards the end of the project to gain maximum informed response to the Vision Statement and Actions through the coordinated use of press, radio, TV and community groups.

Media Management – cultivating the interest of key media personnel rather than relying solely on impersonal news releases.

Meeting With Community Groups – identifying and working with established groups in the community. Connor says 15 minutes of presentation and 45 minutes of listening will bring pleasant surprises to both sides (see Appendix A9 – VISION 2020 Video Tapes).

Newspaper Supplement – although somewhat expensive, this can be a very useful way to provide information and encourage public feedback through a tear-sheet. This often stimulates news coverage, editorials, and letters to the editor.

Open House – a commonly used public involvement technique which stresses informal dialogue. This is a good alternative to having a "Public Meeting" (see Appendix A14 – How To Set Up An Open House).

Public Meeting – O'Connor describes this as the "traditional battlegrounds heavily weighted in favour of opponents of the project" and in his opinion, the "last of the blood sports". If you must have one, he suggests forming tables around a hollow square (don't use a raised stage), minimize presentations, and maximize discussion by breaking into small groups as quickly as possible.

Questionnaires/Sample Surveys – often slow and expensive and can lead to local discontent. However, they have two major advantages, particularly when many

sources of input are involved: they can be formatted to count particular kinds of opinions or responses, and the number of questionnaires distributed can be controlled, thereby regulating the number of responses (see Appendices A4–A8 Sample Questionnaires).

Teleconferencing – the use of multiple telephone links so that numerous people can have a simultaneous discussion from geographically distributed places.

Video – one video is currently available: a 12 minute video on the VISION 2020 program. Call the Vision 2020 Project Office, 422–2020 for further information

Workshops – enable citizen leaders to increase their understanding of the VISION 2020 process, the issues and what council is trying to achieve.

Public Participation
REVIEWING THE MUNICIPAL PROFILE
A Sample Questionnaire

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE MUNICIPAL PROFILE

We cherish many things about our community. There are many special characteristics which make where we live and work a place that is unique in the whole world.

Following is a list. For each category, write down the 3 most important characteristics of the community. Rank them 1, 2, 3, with 1 being the most important and 3 being the least important.

1. People and Values

Consider population characteristics such as age structure, ethnic mix, distribution and density and the values that make the character of the community.

1.

2.

3.

2. Social and Economic Opportunities

Here include livelihood and employment, recreation and cultural opportunities.

1.

2.

3.

3. Physical and Functional

Here include location, physical features and environmental and major functions like services, land uses, and transportation.

1.

2.

3.

Public Participation
BUILDING A PREFERRED FUTURE
A Sample Questionnaire

"If I were King, things would be a lot different around here!" How often have you ever said that to yourself? This is your opportunity to tell us how you would like to see our community, from an idealized perspective.

In each of the following categories, list the three best things about our community. Then describe how you would like to see each of these items, from an ideal perspective, in the year 2020.

1. People and Values

    1. What kind of community do you want it to be?
    2. What values should be preserved in the community?
    3. What would make it a good place for your children to live?
    4. What would be an ideal size for your community?

2. Social and Economic Opportunities

    1. What sort of livelihood opportunities should exist?
    2. What economic strengths should be developed?
    3. What recreational, cultural and other opportunities should be offered?

3. Physical and Functional

    1. What services will be required?
    2. How should the community work with its neighbours and other jurisdictions such as school boards and commissions?

Public Participation

EXPLORING FUTURE TRENDS AND REALISTIC CONSTRAINTS

A Sample Questionnaire

The following statements were agreed upon by council after studying and discussing reports on the emerging trends which will likely influence our community in the future.

Please provide any comments you have for each statement.

Physical and Functional

(Insert Council's summary statement from the Discussion Guide)

People and Heritage

(Insert Council's summary statement from pp. xx–xx of the Discussion Guide)

Economic and Social Opportunities

(Insert Council's summary statement from the Discussion Guide)

1. Do you agree or disagree with each of the statements:

2. What Constraints May Be Important in each of the above? Think about people, organizations, and any weaknesses our community may have in trying to manage these areas in the future.

Public Participation

EXPLORING FUTURE TRENDS AND REALISTIC CONSTRAINTS

A Sample Questionnaire

(Insert your draft Vision Statement here)

This is a preliminary Vision Statement for _____. The purpose of a Vision Statement is to describe what we want our community to be like in the future. This Vision is intended to be idealistic, yet tempered by the reality of the future. The Vision Statement attempts to express our hopes and aspirations for ourselves and our children for the special community where we live, work and play. When we are satisfied that our Vision Statement captures our aspirations for the future, this Vision Statement (or a modified version) will be ratified by council. Then we will establish specific actions to lead us to that goal.

The purpose of this questionnaire is to ask a broad range of our residents and the people who work in our community: Does the above Vision Statement accurately reflect the kind of place we want our community to be in the year 2020?

1. **What do you like about our Vision Statement?**

2. **Are there aspects of the Vision Statement you disagree with?**

   Yes ___ No ___

3. If Yes, how would you change the Vision Statement? If you have a suggested wording, please write it below.

4. Are there aspects of community life which have been omitted and you feel should be addressed in the Vision Statement?

   Yes ___ No ___

5. If Yes, please write down the aspects of life in our community which <u>should</u> be addressed in the Vision Statement.

Public Involvement

DEVELOPING ACTION STRATEGIES

A Sample Questionnaire

The draft Action list is a "Things To Do" list which will guide our municipality into the future. Each action, when completed, will bring us one step closer to the future community we want.

While the Actions are a strategy for helping us get to where we choose to be, it is not intended to be a detailed list. Instead, it is intended to be a general guide which emphasizes realistic actions and the resources in our own community.

The Actions we want to undertake will help us achieve our Vision, provided below. Our Vision Statement is council's carefully developed view of the future of our community which is idealistic, yet tempered by reality.

This Vision Statement will provide the basis for developing consistent policies for a wide range of municipal responsibilities and be used to guide other strategic planning activities.

Our Vision Statement:

(Insert your municipality's Vision Statement here)

Our Actions:

(Insert your municipality's Actions here)

THE IMPORTANCE OF YOUR COMMENTS

To evaluate these Actions, please consider these questions and provide your comments:

1. Do you agree with the priorities that have been assigned to the actions?
2. If you do not agree with the priorities, how would you re-order them?
3. Has the list of Actions missed some important resources inside the community (such as service groups, clubs, people, or businesses) which could really help out in implementing some of the actions?

If yes, please list the resources within our community that have been omitted.

4. Are there some Actions which have been missed and should be listed? If yes, please list them here.

5. Please provide any other suggestions you may have. We welcome your comments.

(Name (optional) Address (optional)

Do you wish to receive further information when it is available?

Yes ___
No ___

COMMENTS:

VISION 2020 VIDEO TAPES

Video tapes are available for public viewing. These can be an excellent tool for public involvement.

1. VISION 2020 VIDEO

The 12 minute VISION 2020 Video provides an introduction to the program. Although originally intended for municipal elected and administrative officials, this video can serve as a good "ice-breaker" for involving community organizations not familiar with the program. This tape can be used anytime in the VISION 202 process.

2. TRENDS VIDEOS

For further information please call the Vision 2020 Project Office at 422-2020.

TIPS FOR WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

1. Write up a short (1–2) page summary or backgrounder of the community's Vision 2020 initiative. Reporters can use this for reference. Provide information on:

   - purpose of the VISION 2020 initiative
   - a statement on what your council hopes to achieve and how it will benefit the community
   - council's time line for completion and public involvement
   - main contact people for more information
   - "quotable quotes" from council
   - refer to Alberta Municipal Affairs, 422–2020 in Edmonton, for province–wide context
   - refer to your Regional Resource Person

2. Provide the media with a reason for covering your event by inviting high profile community members such as the mayor, councillors, MLA, MP, etc..

3. Notify media 7 days prior to your event (if you give them more than 7 days notice, they may forget; with less than 7 days notice, they may already be booked).

4. Use high profile community leaders (mayor, town manager) for contacting media.

HOW TO HOLD A NEWS CONFERENCE

- Hold a news conference only when you have a "high profile" spokesperson, such as the mayor or chief municipal administrator;

- News conferences require extra time for travel by reporters, so hold a news conferences only when the event is important enough to justify the extra time for media people to attend;

- If you decide to hold a news conference, here is a typical agenda:

  1. The spokesperson presents a short statement on the main points

  2. The spokesperson provides background information and elaborates on the main points

  3. The spokesperson then asks for questions from reporters

- In advance of the press conference:

  - prepare a written copy of the spokesperson's statement and general information (on the VISION 2020 process, the Vision Statement and Action Agenda, whichever you consider appropriate at the time);

  - distribute the written statement at the press conference to help reporters develop their "story" and insure that all information, such as quotes, is correct. A good time to hand out material is following the main points (#1 above).

WRITING A PRESS RELEASE

Issuing a press release is a common way for many organizations to communicate with the public. The main advantages of press releases are that all media receive exactly the same message, the timing of the release can be strategically controlled to make the biggest impact, and minimal staff resources are required. The main disadvantages of press releases are that there is no assurance that the media will use the release and only a minimal amount of information is usually transmitted.

Here are the basics of writing a press release:

1. The most important information (who, what, where, why, and how) must be covered in the first part of the release (usually the first one or two paragraphs). This is the part of the release which captures the reader's attention and provides the most important information even if the reader doesn't finish reading the story.

2. Other important details are covered in the second part of the release.

3. The last part of the release covers miscellaneous information.

4. List contact people and telephone numbers so reporters can follow-up if necessary.

TIPS FOR RADIO AND TV

1. Target radio and TV stations that offer community service announcements. These operators are frequently looking for local interest events or announcements;

2. Invite radio and TV reporters to cover public involvement events (such as open houses) on their news programs;

3. Offer to do a pre-taped guest editorial, which many stations have as part of their programming format;

4. Arrange to have a high profile person, such as the mayor, appear on an interview show or take part in a call-in program;

5. Offer to invite radio or TV media to take part by doing a documentary or news feature.

HOW TO SET UP AN OPEN HOUSE

The "Open House" is probably the most frequently used public involvement action. The main objective of an Open House is to provide an informal setting where people can obtain information and provide their comments, at their leisure. Open Houses usually provide information visually, through a display; verbally, with the assistance of knowledgeable staff; and in written form using handouts.

The main ingredients for a successful Open House are:

1. Have interesting material for people to view. Do this by setting up a display which provides information in a clear, easy-to-understand and visual way;

2. Staff your display with people who are knowledgable about the project on:

   - what is the purpose of the material?
   - why is it important or necessary?
   - what public feedback is being sought?
   - when is the deadline for public comments?
   - what is the next step after the Open House finishes?
   - who can the public talk to for more information?
   - what role can various community groups play?

3. Advertise the Open House 7-10 days in advance

   - less than 7 days is insufficient time for most people's schedules; more than 10 days notice and people will forget
   - use the media (radio, community newspapers, schools, community groups, bulletins at places like the Post Office or coffee shop)

- try to make the Open House a community social event by providing coffee and snacks

- make sure the building where the Open House is held is provided with bold signs telling that "This Is The Place"

4. Make sure people "sign in" so you can have a record of who attended if follow-up is required.

5. Give people the opportunity to submit written comments "for the record", either at the Open House or to be returned by mail at a later date. Provide a questionnaire (see Appendix for samples) for those who feel more comfortable answering specific questions, rather than having to construct their own document of opinions.

6. Choose your Open House time and dates carefully. Is your Open House date going to conflict with the hockey game or curling/golf day?

7. Invite the media. Newspaper, TV and radio reporters are always looking for community news. The media are instrumental in helping you get your message out to the public.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT REFERENCES

Although numerous books have been written about public involvement and public participation, the following were the main written references used to prepare this guide.

Citizen Participation in America: Essays on the State of the Art, edited by Stuart Langton, (The Lincoln Filene Centre for Citizenship and Public Affairs, Tufts University). Lexington, Mass: Lexington Books 1978.

Of particular use in public participation planning is Chapter 9, Matching Method to Purpose: The Challenges of Planning Citizen–Participation Activities, by Judy B. Rosener. Rosener gives a practical nine step process for planning and evaluating a public involvement program.

Constructive Citizen Participation, by Desmond M. Connor. Victoria, B.C.: Connor Development Services Ltd. 1981.

Connor is a consulting sociologist who specializes in citizen participation. This reference is a three–ring binder collection of Connor's self–published newsletter and a collection of case studies and short (1–2 page) discussions of public participation techniques and strategies. For instance, there is a 2 page discussion of the pros and cons of using the Open House and how to solicit public feedback.

The Public Involvement Manual, by James L. Creighton. Cambridge, Mass: Abt Books. 1981.

This is another practical handbook. Creighton describes how to plan for public involvement, provides short descriptions of the pros and cons of a wide range of public involvement techniques, and gives the reader checklists for public meetings and preferred sequences of events for events such as news conferences. He also explains how to analyze and evaluate public feedback and write a public feedback report.

Public Participation in Planning for Small Communities, by Jean Monteith and Jackie Wolfe. Proceedings of the 1980 Canadian Institute of Planners National Conference. Kitchener, Ontario. 1980.